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Active Love a criterion of Spiritual Life

A SERMON

PREACHED IN SUBSTANCE AT

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY

BEFORE THE

Church Penitentiary Association

ON

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SERMON.

1 JOHN, iii. 14.

‘ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.’

ST. JOHN is in a peculiar sense the geographer of the Spiritual World; and his first Epistle is our Chart or Handbook of the Life of God in the human soul. With such a guide it is not difficult for even the least practised traveller to find his way; since the apostle gives the fullest and most particular description of that beautiful district, so rich in all that moves our interest and our wonder. His is no colourless outline, but a picture wherein hill and valley, light and shade, desert and garden, are each portrayed. The richest pastures, the highest elevations of this marvellous region — its points of contact with and points of unlikeness to the life of Nature — its products and its resources — its outward and fugitive characteristics of surface, and its deep inner unchanging laws, whether of growth or of decay, are here in succession brought before us. There is no mistaking the more prominent features; they stand out in statements so unlike aught else in human speech, except the very Words of Our Lord Himself, that for a moment we know not whether most to marvel at the simplicity of the language which conveys them, or at the greatness and depth of the truth which it conveys. ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves’ — ‘He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar’ — ‘All that is of the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father’ — ‘Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself’ — ‘Whatsoever is born of God doth not commit sin’ — ‘Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh, is not of God’ — ‘He that loveth not, knoweth not God’ — ‘We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.’

Each truth, taken apart from its context, seems perfect and complete in itself. Each truth, when first encountered, meets us, as if, filled with life, it sparkled in the light like a precious stone, that the soul’s eye may seek to discover its

hidden meaning.* Each is presented to us without limitations, without toning down or shading off, without balance of truth against truth, without the conditions which we know must affect our final estimate. As we gaze, each seems gradually to rise before us, like a mountain-peak, bold and clear against the sky of heaven—for the time narrowing up the horizon of the soul, and occupying its whole field of vision; that, contemplating with undistracted sight the force and beauty of each separate truth, the soul may yield itself to each, first to one and then to another, and may thus be successively fascinated, possessed, transfigured, changed by each from glory to glory.

This character of teaching—always most forcible—is especially needful for those who are recent converts to the Faith of Christ. To them, the lines which separate truth and falsehood, sin and holiness, are not as yet so clear that the sight of these bold and prominent landmarks can be dispensed with. Such persons are still, to a great extent, feeling their way. That which may be a platitude or an axiom to others, has for them all the welcome freshness of a newly-discovered and original truth. Writing for such as these, who sit on the lower forms in the school of Our Blessed Saviour, the Apostle of Love makes himself at once understood by them; while yet his words, that seem so simple, reveal an unfathomable depth of truth to those who have known Our Lord best and longest. In mapping out the New Life for beginners, he does not forget the needs of the most advanced. The New Life, which Our Lord has by His Spirit shed upon the Church, is in this epistle drawn out from the recesses of the soul into the public highway of human language. Here we note the essence of this life—communion with the Father and His Blessed Son. Here we see its ideal—nothing less than perfection in the ways of God. Here we study its calm yet firm grasp of revealed dogma, its sense of remaining inner sin, yet of abounding light, streaming from the Unction of the Holy One, its profound opposition to the spirit and maxims of corrupt human society, which is called the ‘world.’ Here, above all, we are taught to understand that which is, in some respects, its most characteristic feature, and the certain secret of its attractive power over the hearts of men. The ‘love of the brethren’ is unfolded to us as being the shadow of that Heavenly Love which shone in Its brightest splendour upon the Cross.

1. The text, then, is addressed to a state of mind in which

* Ebrard. *Johannisbriefe* Einl. p. 46.

there is still more or less of anxiety as to whether the soul has indeed and really passed, at its conversion, from the sphere of death to the sphere of life. It cannot be difficult for many here to enter with at least some sympathy into that very distressing yet not uncommon trial of the soul. We know how, when a great joy or a great sorrow comes upon us, all seems at first unreal and phantom-like. In its rapture or its agony, the soul loses its hold even of the every-day certainties of feeling and experience. Life seems for the time a dream, and, like night-sentinels, we challenge each duty and each friend to answer to their names and purposes. This passing sense of insecurity is more common in the life of grace than in that of nature, because the former is more entirely removed from the visible things to which our weakness clings than the latter. And so here we have a doubt, produced by the very greatness of the gift of Life, whether Life has been given after all. The vision seems too blessed to be more than a vision — too glorious to be literally true. Is there any one symptom or fact upon which the mind can fall back as upon a decisive proof that all is not a dream? Can we be convinced that the change is as real and the gift as certain as the promise of God is sure, and that that encompassing presence of doubt and shadow is itself a transient and untrustworthy illusion? Can we *know* that we are standing on the firm ground of the Land of Life, and that the sun is shining on us from its glorious Heaven?

Now, it is to this condition of soul, thus craving for a criterion of true Life, that St. John incidentally addresses himself. ‘We know,’ he says, ‘that we have passed from death unto life.’ And how? Before we consider his decision more narrowly, observe what it is that he does *not* say. He says not, Because we have been baptised. Not that he doubted the regenerating efficacy of the sacrament which he had himself* traced up to its fountain-head in the Riven Side of the Crucified, but because he knew that it is one thing to have been called into a state of salvation, and another to have persevered in it. Nor, again, Because we have an assurance that we live. Not that he would question the inner supernatural consolations which God might bestow upon favoured souls, but because, besides cutting off all hope for those who did not share in this rare and precarious experience, he might by such a test have encouraged the easy confidence of a dull and torpid conscience, or even of a particular physical temperament. Nor yet does he say, Because God has strewn our path with temporal blessings. The sun shone and the rain fell as well upon the persecuting empire as upon the perse-

* 1 John, v. 6; S. John. xix. 34.

cuted Church; if temporal prosperity is the blessing of the Older dispensation, adversity, it has been remarked, is rather the blessing of the New; and the apostle would hardly put forward a criterion which would deny their spiritual vitality to the Martyrs in their agony, while attributing it to the Pagans who shed their blood. Least of all does he say, Because we have made a great intellectual progress — because we have advanced in speculation, and adopted new modes of thought, and exploded many antiquated traditions of our forefathers. Certainly Christianity, as a revelation, was an advance on Judaism; but to regard God's gift of a higher knowledge as a sort of intellectual decoration, which of itself was a test of life, would have been to forget that there is a knowledge of truth in hell, and to encourage a tone of self-assertion which is as remote as possible from the true temper of the gospel. No; St. John points to a deeper test. The grace of sacraments may be forfeited; the sense of assurance, a delusion; a worldly prosperity may be the seal of reprobation; and intellectual progress may go hand in hand with the deepest spiritual degradation. But there is a test of life which points as a rule to a sacramental origin, and which warrants a humble assurance of God's favour, and which can use or dispense with temporal well-being, and which encourages an even deeper knowledge of that Truth which is its Object. My brethren,—that test is Love.

2. Human life, wherever unrenewed by our Lord's blessing and doctrine, has been consistently marked by the manifested presence of unchecked selfishness. Whether coarse and brutal, or polished and refined, selfishness is the moral attitude of unchristianised man. The society of the old Roman Empire, rising from the base of its vast slave population, to its apex in the Cæsar, was a vast hierarchy of selfishness, in which class preyed on class, and man on man. And what, let us ask, is selfishness? It is refracted love. It is that perversion of love which fixes it on a false object — viz., self. God has endowed every human being with a fund of love; and you will find no heart so brutal or so hard as not to retain, in some depth or corner, some portion of this original endowment. God gave to man this love, that by it man might seek Himself Who gave it; it was to be the moral law of an attraction, whereby the human soul should move around, while gravitating towards its Centre. Certainly the selfish man loves; but in his case the ray of love, instead of darting upwards from the heart to embrace its One Rightful Object, and then at His bidding to shed its blessed tenderness upon a fellow-creature, is at once, by a perverse and miserable deflection, bent backwards upon its source. Thus the selfish man becomes, through

this refraction of his love, his own centre, his own end — it is an awful thought,—his own God.* His life is not necessarily inactive; but his activity is simply the measure of his love of self. All that play of thought and feeling, all that energy and passion of movement, all that incessant and exacting routine of public labours and of private duties, all turns out, upon ultimate analysis, to be nothing higher than a life-long, processional worship, which the man offers to the divinity of self. It may be that he will even admit this to be so. He has erected his own miserable experience into a theory. He will tell you that he has seen a great deal of life, and that he does not believe in the existence of a really unselfish or disinterested character. His doctrine is broadly this—that every man has his price if you can succeed in discovering it; and that the only real difference is that which lies between those who acknowledge the empire of self over the conduct of human life on the one hand, and those who vainly endeavour to disguise it, whether from themselves or from mankind at large, on the other.

Yet, let us recognise the truth — selfishness is death. Not always social death: a selfish man may succeed in pushing his way in the world. Not always political death: a selfish policy may, at least temporarily, win for a people wealth or power, or some form of merely material greatness. But moral death; — aye, always and everywhere. For in the moral world love is analogous to those mighty forces in nature whereby planets are kept true to the orbit in which they move around their central suns. If this regulating love be diverted from its true object—if the planet aspires to become its own sun—what can ensue but disaster and ruin? And yet a selfish life, however full of annoyance and distress to others, is most ruinous, after all, to the man who lives it. One by one the tendrils which the character would throw out around other lives are withered and killed; one by one the finer sensibilities of the soul are deadened; one by one the symptoms of the moral life become fainter and less distinct. In time, love, centring more and more intensely upon self, loses the proper character of love, and dies outright. The heart of the moral life has ceased to beat; the senses of the soul no longer feel; the selfish man is a moral corpse. Living in a world of suffering, he is blind to the wounds and deaf to the entreaties of his fellow-men: they crave sympathy, and he is dumb; they implore relief, and he is motionless. Aye, he infects the very air of society around him; the contagion of his example spreads like a pestilence; and the moral constitution must be strong in holiness and love to resist the infection of that noisome

* Phil. iii. 19, where St. Paul applies this moral doctrine to gluttony.

atmosphere which he has generated, and which hangs heavily around him. 'But then he is a man of letters?' It may be, 'Influential and stirring?' Possibly. 'So refined, so accomplished, so religious?' Brethren, I really cannot help it. St. John has already described his *real* condition: 'He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.' Mark that—'abideth.' It is a state of moral death, which lasts. The selfish activity of his natural life is but a foil which shows forth more plainly the abiding death of his spirit. His powers of business, of discussion, of administration, of criticism, stand in ghastly contrast with the absence of true, self-forgetting sympathy for any single human being. It is not a trance that we witness; it is not epilepsy or paralysis; it is the grave. Dark is that soul in which God's light shines not; cold, in which God's love burns not; corrupt, for already the worms of self-indulgence and conceit, and envy and disappointment, are gnawing out the cold and fetid heart, which has preceded the body that encases it in its passage to the tomb.

Speaking for the God of Love, I might well be expected to bear no malice or hatred in my breast. Yet I am constrained to confess to you, brethren, that I do hate selfishness. Not selfish men; God forbid, they are my brothers; but selfishness, that plague-spot of human life—that parent of its errors and its misery. Surely it *is* hateful, when we look hard at it. Hateful when incarnate in an opinion, a mere human speculation, which yet dares to say to the consciences of men, Believe me: I am the Truth. Hateful when seated upon a throne and crowned, not to rule for the good of the many, but to cry to the peoples, I am Power: obey me. Hateful when its mouthpiece is a demagogue, who seems to say to a deluded populace, Claim your rights, but who in truth whispers, Carry me to power. But never so intensely hateful as when, crouching behind a lustful passion, reckless of shame and cost, it mutters aloud, Gratify me. And we are on this occasion led inevitably to reflect on this the most odious and repulsive of all the known forms of selfishness. Nowhere, you will observe, are the ravages of selfishness so dreadful as in the sphere which is traversed by the Church Penitentiary Association on its blessed errand of mercy. Nowhere else is self worshipped with sacrifices of such price and beauty. Here, like another Moloch, it is appeased by the agony of human victims: here its altars are indeed reddened with human gore. Elsewhere it may content itself with wealth, or incense, or supremacy, or pleasure; here it must have the bodies and the souls of women and of men. It feeds upon the bloom and health and life-strength of its victim's body, after contemptuously snatching and casting to the winds the peace and joy, and conscience and salvation

of that victim's soul. What, I would ask, is this selfishness of sensuality, when really reigning in a man, but the very abomination of desolation in the temple of God? What is this stamp of moral and physical degradation, which proclaims the reign of sensualised self, but the genuine mark of the Beast?

3. Let us turn to St. John's account of the symptom by which we Christians may know that we have passed from death unto life. The Alpine climber, who has no instrument at hand by which to ascertain his exact elevation, yet can observe that the vegetation has altered its character, or that it is disappearing, or that the air he breathes is sensibly more rare and more exhilarating, or that the line of snow is just above him. The traveller who crosses by night the frontier which divides two empires, unable to detect the exact line of the boundary, yet can note the change of language, the change of uniform, the altered character of the general culture, and deportment, and civilisation of the people. The moral world, too, has its indistinct frontier lines, and yet also its broad distinctions, which prove that the frontiers are real. How, then, can we know that we are on the mountain-side with our Heavenly Guide, high above the mists of the vale of selfishness? How can we be sure that the spiritual frontier has been really passed, which separates the Kingdom of the Living from the Realm of Death? St. John replies, Because we love the brethren. Spiritual privileges, a confident temper, worldly prosperity, or intellectual movement, do not prove what *is* proved by the presence of love. For 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.'* When we feel our heart beat with these divine pulsations of a Higher Life, we know that we have passed the Rubicon, and that we are in our True Country. For beyond the frontier of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, there is no such thing as this New Love of the brethren. There is much that seems like it, although in truth profoundly distinct. There is the love of relations, friends, and country; the love of those whom we benefit or who do us good; the love which is secure of its return, whether of service or affection. But this love of those whom we like, or who like us, is obviously, and from the nature of the case, a narrow love. It is always bounded, and you need not travel far to discover its range. It follows in the wake of a family influence, or of a national flag, or of the traditions of a school, or of a political party, or of a philosophical system. Moreover, on a closer examination, it turns out to be only a disguised form of the love of self. The truth must be spoken: in a state of nature man does not love

* 1 John, iv. 16.

his fellow-man. The civilised man does not love the savage, nor the savage the civilised man, nor the civilised man the man who is equally civilised with himself. Contempt, fear, and rivalry are the natural relations of fallen man with his brother man; and they are incompatible with love. Nature does not teach the rich to love the poor, nor the high-born to love the lower orders, nor the intelligent to love the stupid, nor the respectable to love those who have lost their character. If natural men help each other, it is from a motive of fear or of interest, or, at best, of duty — but with a secret repulsion that forbids the growth of love. In the natural order of life, man fears, suspects, envies, despises, contemns his brother: he does not love him. Human life is made up of a tissue of personal feuds, of family quarrels, of class hatreds, of professional hatreds, of national hatreds; and these are carefully hoarded up and decked out by those who write human history as being forsooth its time-honoured traditions, and then they are passed on as heirlooms from generation to generation. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour came down from heaven that He might banish from the hearth of the human family its old antipathies, and introduce the reign of goodwill amongst men. ‘A new commandment,’ He said to His generation—‘a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.’ New as it was, that commandment was obeyed. Jesus Christ shone in His perfection upon the human heart, and, like the closed bud, it opened at the bidding of the shining sun. In loving Our Blessed Saviour, men were trained to the love of God: in learning to love the Unseen and Incomprehensible God, the heart opened sufficiently to love the human brotherhood. To the Christian, every human being became an object of interest and of affection. The love of the Christian was to follow in the track of the Love Which had created and redeemed the world. Had not God made each separate human life? Had not Jesus Christ died for each separate human life? Then surely each human life must be full of dignity and of mystery. Just as the botanist finds interest in that which to others is but as a worthless weed, so, beneath the shadow of the Cross, the Christian sees in every human being a mind that *can* know the Very and Eternal Truth—a heart that *can* make answer to the Heart of God—a vast unexplored inner world of thought, feeling, resolve, desire, hope, grief, anguish, passion. To the Christian, every separate life is seen to be no mere specimen of a class: for has it not its own special work? does it not, like a meteor across the heavens, pursue its own path in time—a path which none other can share—a path which has its own length, its own brightness, its own darkness, its own end? Is not every living man in one of two states, and

has he not one of two eternal destinies before him, and is there not some one special work which he alone was meant to do? Who can refuse interest to human life, when in the school of Jesus Christ he has learnt its value? And yet this interest may be merely speculative; it is not necessarily love. But then, in every soul the Christian beholds the image of the Great Object of his true affection: every soul speaks to him of the handy-work of the Creator, and of the Tears and Blood of the Redeemer, and of the toil and Breath of the Sanctifier. The love of God lavished in profusion upon the unthankful and the evil obliges the Christian not merely to love his Christian brother, but to love his brother man as man. It was wonderful, that first awakening of this perception in the human heart, at our Blessed Saviour's bidding. That primitive love had all the charm of a newly-discovered accomplishment, unknown to previous generations; and it was practised by the missionaries and martyrs of early Christendom as if with the buoyant delight that is moved by recent discovery. It was like a new sense developed from within, opening indeed upon familiar objects, but perceiving in them a revelation of unsuspected beauty; it had all that keenness of appetite and fresh vigour of appreciation which no impaired health or spirits had as yet blunted or enfeebled. Here was a heaven-sent faculty, capable of breasting the devastating forces of selfishness, and of renewing the face of the earth. Human thought had dared to dream of a love that should be absolutely *humanitarian*—that should be bounded only by the limits of the race; and lo! Christ our Lord had realised it!

4. We need not to linger on this attractive topic, for again and again the world has done homage to this feature of our Lord's work. It has admired the largeness, the disinterestedness, the tenderness, the depth, the gracefulness of the love which He has shed on human hearts. It has even acknowledged in this love a power which might regenerate society—a panacea for its own manifold woes. And it has gone on to ask, 'Cannot we, too, cultivate this love, apart from that belief which accompanies it in the Church? Cannot we utilise it in our camps and hospitals—cannot we make it the stay and the embellishment of our human life, without at the same time accepting that system of dogma, that high moral ideal, that priesthood, those historical Scriptures and those mystical Sacraments? Surely,' it has proceeded to insinuate, 'these things are but the outer husk and form, while love is the imperishable spirit and life; we will sever the spirit from the letter, the essence from the accidents; creeds and doctrines have done their work; they belong to past ages, when thought was fixed and enquiry impossible: but love shall remain among us when these

are gone, as at least one legacy of the Christ, to make life brighter and death less full of gloom than nature has made them.'

To this proposal to sever the gift of love from the gift of truth, the Church of God has ever said, and will say unto the end, 'It is impossible.' 'What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' It were just as reasonable for the sick man to hope that he might enjoy the blessing of sound health while yet he persisted in declining to be regular in exercise, and moderate in diet, and observant of those laws which regulate the healthful developement of the body. There is a fundamental error abroad as to the connection that exists between this repudiated doctrine and that welcomed love. They are not thrown together by an accident: the creed is not the shell or clothing of a moral life within it; on the contrary, we *must* say to our latitudinarian critics, 'That love which you admire is the direct result of that creed which you condemn. We Christians love, because we believe: our belief is the motive and the measure of our love. Because we believe in the Incarnation of God, descending from His throne, out of pure love, to the lowliness of Bethlehem and to the ignominy and anguish of Calvary—therefore there arises in our hearts a responsive love, evoked by His transcendent charity. We love Him because He first loved us. Because He bade us love one another *as* He had loved us, therefore ours may be no narrow love. He died for us and for all poor sinners, that we might embalm the memory of His precious death in a love which shrinks not from opening its arms to all for whom He died. This self-sacrifice, the social fruits of which you covet, is the true, the highest expression of our love to Him Whom our creed reveals to us. 'As He laid down His life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren.'*

'The brethren.' Who are they? Are they fellow-Christians—our peers or our superiors in the sympathies and graces of the divine life? If so, where is the parallel between this love of ours for equals or superiors, and that love of His? Did He, then, reserve His love for a race of beings who were worthy of it, and who would at once return it? Did He not rather love us in our sins, in our perverseness, in our folly; did He not love us in spite of our being what we were, that we might reflect something of this His love upon those who are less indebted than we to His mercy and His loving kindness? The 'brethren' of this Epistle are the whole human family; because the love of the Christian is to be as the love of Christ—world-embracing, and regardless of acknowledgement and return.† Too often, we His followers love those who give something back—sympathy of spirit, or bright example, or consolation, or assistance—and

* 1 John, iii. 16; iv. 19.

† This point is well developed by Ebrard. *Die Briefe Johannis.* p. 262, sqq.

we only *patronise* the poor, and the ignorant, and the heathen; we do not profess to *love* them. But 'God commendeth His love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us,'* and we are to 'know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.'

5. In this way we are enabled to grasp a great law of the Christian life. It is this. The wider the moral and spiritual interval between the heart which loves and the object of its affection, the nearer does this human love approach to the standard of Mount Calvary.

We may not undervalue the love of friend for friend, of brother for brother in Christ. This love is an earthly shadow of the love of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity for Each Other in heaven. It is a fulfillment in measure of that divine intercession, 'As Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that They also may be one in Us.'† But more like to that 'love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' is the love which fastens on an ungrateful, repulsive object — an object that invites no sympathies, and that proffers no recompense. Such love is Christ-like in proportion to the absence of anything that would naturally provoke it. It carries our thoughts up towards the Great Sacrifice; the Spirit of Jesus, we feel, lives in His members. Certainly no interval that may exist between the most true-hearted saint and the most reckless sinner can compare with the abyss that assuredly severs the least sinful of His creatures from the sinless Christ. Certainly no eye of man bending in tender love from an elevation of peace and purity over a fellow-creature imbruted by the most degrading sin, can for a moment represent to us that last gaze which the Great Victim for human errors cast from His Cross — I will not say upon the blaspheming multitude, but — on the loved and saintly forms beneath Him. No human ministry can, like His, be expiatory and redemptive; no mere man can deliver his brother, or make agreement unto God for him; none, save One, can atone, although we may plead and administer a finished Atonement. But whenever the object of love is most perfectly removed from the character and sympathies of the soul which loves, there the approach to Our Holy Lord is nearest. The Church abounds in shadows, more or less clear in outline, of That Love Which redeemed her. The parent, loving perseveringly an ungrateful son; the teacher, devoting himself to scholars who see in his sacrifice of time and strength only an interference with their liberty; the landlord, who spends capital, thought, energy, for a tenantry that will not do justice to his intentions; the statesman, who legislates for the ultimate good of

* Rom. v. 8.

† S. John, xvii. 21.

a people, to the ruin of his present popularity; the missionary who carries the greatest of all blessings to a pagan tribe that will presently put him to a cruel death for doing so — all of them, in very different degrees, carry the principle of the Redemption into human life. But if you press me to point out to you the one form of love which at the present day most powerfully recalls to me the Good Shepherd seeking His lost ones, I am constrained to point to the Sister of Mercy, so ennobled by her love of the degraded and fallen woman whom she tends, for Christ's sake, in a penitentiary. The parent, the teacher, even the missionary, have motives to exertion which are denied to the Sister of Mercy; in the penitentiary you have the greatest interval between ministering love and its object, and therefore in the penitentiary the moral triumph seems most complete. For, on the one hand, there is education, refinement, a sensitive modesty, a fearless purity, a combination of all that makes a woman's character most beautiful and attractive, consecrated by the piety which has freely given a life to this uninviting service. On the other, love, reverence, modesty, faith, religion, character, intelligence, all have perished; and there remains only an emasculate will, a corrupt imagination, a memory that is yet a charnel-house of evil, an expression that witnesses to the despotism of lust, a worn and haggard form which bespeaks the autumn of life, and which seems to tell of years that have never been lived. You must descend to that lower region of animalised life to understand the misery of its unspeakable humiliation — to estimate the hardness, the coarseness, the cruelty, the disgust at all that leads up to or that reflects God — the recklessness, the self-assertion, the immodesty, the want of principle and the want of heart, the absence of all that elevates, the presence of all that degrades and repels, in the victims of sin. Vast is the love which spans that chasm: it is the vastness of the love which ensures its success. Here, if anywhere, is the knowledge of having passed from death to life warranted. No transient, feeble sentiment could endure that inevitable toil — could bear up against those crushing disappointments — could enwrap as with a wreath of fire that earthly being whom sensuality has defiled, and whom love must purify.

6. And this leads us to observe incidentally the powerlessness of society to deal with this gigantic evil. Society confesses herself unequal to the task. She protests, she deplures, she condemns; but she does not command the moral resources which are necessary if she is to grapple with her enemy. Society can only banish the sinner who has outraged her conventionalisms. And the banished sinner sinks as they sink who are drowned not in free water, but

beneath the ice of winter. After the first descent, the sinner instinctively rises; but it is to discover that everywhere the surface is coated by a barrier — hard, impenetrable, merciless — which denies to her a return to the upper atmosphere. The iron has entered into her soul: she has no choice. She must sink again. Think you not, brethren, that those daughters of shame, when, at the intervals of their delirium, they would fain return to the purity and peace of former years, and when they find all the avenues of pure life blockaded against them with a jealous vigilance which nothing can escape — think you not that they scorn, with a sharp, joyless laugh, the claim of that society which condemns them, to bear the name of Him whom they have themselves openly rejected? Aye, depend upon it, as they scan that social life from which they are excluded; as they sullenly watch it while it contemptuously ignores them in the highway or the public assembly; as they review with a sinister and bitter sneer its respectable economy or its wasteful magnificence, they ask themselves if it has aught to do with One Who sat on the curb-stone of the well during the weary hours of an Eastern day, pleading with the Samaritan woman for her soul — Who absolved the adulteress taken in the very act of sin — Who undertook the cause of the penitent Magdalene against the self-righteousness of the Pharisee.

Are we, then, to make it a charge against society that she thus banishes the fallen woman from her precincts? Certainly not. Society cannot do otherwise. She may not trifle with those fundamental laws, upon an adherence to which her very existence is based. Society is an expansion of the life of the family, and that crime which is destructive of the pure family life is ultimately and no less certainly subversive of the social fabric. In a Christian society, Our Lord has shed a peculiar blessing upon the family, as the foundation-stone of organised human life: His authority is represented by the father, His love by the mother, His obedience by the child; and to weaken this consecrated foundation is to endanger the pile which rests upon it. Destroy the family, and you sap our Christian civilisation, and the greatness and happiness of our country. Better far that society should seem hard and merciless than that she should patronise vice, only because it happens to affect an outward guise which does not ordinarily belong to it, and endeavours to veil its inherent grossness beneath an exterior of conventional refinement. Pardon me, my brethren, if I make allusion to reports which may well fill the mind of a thoughtful Christian with dark forebodings for the future of our country; but it is said that, at least in this metropolis, society has of late seemed to condone that which is treason against her very existence, by breaking down the sacred and

exclusive barrier which fences in the pure family life on which she is based. This is a leniency which imperils the innocent without saving the sinful. This is not an absolution from sin : it is a co-partnership with guilt. No. Let society mark well her bulwarks and set up her houses. Let her at least be true to the instinct of self-preservation. It is one thing to treat the sinner as the Pharisee treated her : it is another to tell sin that it is innocence. Certainly society cannot emulate those supernatural efforts which the Church puts forth for the recovery of the lost ; but this is no reason for making a compact with sin, since such a compact would involve no less than a social return to barbarism—nothing less than the gratuitous defilement and ruin of multitudes of souls.

7. But this consideration of the powerlessness of society in the matter must convince us that whoever would deal with it successfully must bring to the work that which society lacks—a high type of organised religious life. Such a life not only can act with certain effect upon the fallen by means of the prodigal self-sacrifice which it fosters and embodies, but it is also a protection against that corruption which might elsewhere ensue from such intimate contact with the impure. Such a life is emphatically a creation of the Church. A past generation endeavoured to restore the victims of sin by a less costly effort than the modern penitentiary. The programme was simple : it involved—first, a subscription list ; then, a site ; next, some kind of fortified building ; after that, a paid resident matron, and the occasional services of a chaplain. The aim of so feeble a type of institution could hardly reach beyond the restoration of an external respectability. We, brethren, labouring through the agencies of this Association, content ourselves with nothing less than the salvation of perishing souls as the object of our efforts. And because we understand the dignity, and resource, and mystery that belong to every soul, therefore we do not expect to compass by a mere machinery, results which call for the exercise of the most discerning penetration, and the warmest affection, and the most intrepid and persevering will that is discoverable in the Church. To restore principle, where the sense of fixed truth has perished outright ; to unfold a heart which has long closed against all the finer human sympathies ; to teach obedience, and submission, and consistency of purpose, and reverence for truth and goodness, and purity of act and word and thought ;—this is no light labour for those who can do it best. It demands an incessant effort ; and such an effort will fail if it be only a perpetual and conscious repetition of acts—if it be anything less than an instinct—if it proceed not from a well-spring of love, ever gushing up freely from the depths of the heart.

And you must feed that love, by a life which perpetually directs it upon its Great Object. This is the meaning of the constant communions and services, of the meditations and retreats, of the religious atmosphere and devotional accompaniments of the sisterhood. It is a shallow appreciation which would view these things as a concession to a taste which you consent to gratify in consideration of the work done. On the contrary, these features are the mainspring of the whole. In her sphere, each sister is 'a prophet of the Highest, going before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins.' Fresh from the Divine Presence, she reflects unconsciously upon the degraded soul something of God's justice, of His purity, of His mercy, of His love; she proclaims by her very temper and bearing that 'the Dayspring from on high hath visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.' It is from these precious channels of communion with the Source of life that her vigour is drawn: it is because she lives above the world and apart from it, in the tabernacle of her God, that her hand is ever so ready, and her smile so bright and so joyous, and her influence so well-nigh omnipotent in that realm of death.

I venture, then, brethren, to recommend this Association very earnestly to your continued support. It may at least plead the number of souls which it has actually helped to save from a dreadful end. Nor should we forget how healthy is the influence which, by its mere existence, such an Association exercises upon the national thought. No one can have observed the laws which regulate the formation of opinion without remarking how receptive are most of the streamlets that swell the great flood of public thought, and how generally they take colour and direction, not from the inner reasons of things, but from the verdict which is implied in the existence of facts and institutions around them. To many persons, who are, from whatever circumstances, unable to fall back upon a deeper conviction, the existence of this Association is of itself a condemnation of impurity. It is a means of bringing before their minds the ghastly evils of unchecked sensuality, and the sentiment with which it is regarded by thoughtful Christians.* But, further, such an

* Of late years, legislation on the questions of divorce and marriage, and other causes, have contributed to weaken the strength and purity of national opinion (as distinct from religious belief) on this class of subjects, and to make it desirable that nothing should be neglected which can keep the broad principles of the law of God clear and plain before the conscience and intellect of England.

Association is a fresh call to the highest purity in all those who are led to support it. St. Paul's rebuke to the Pharisee, 'Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?''* must nerve us, my Christian brethren, to the culture of a purity of thought and spirit such as the gospel indeed contemplates. In aiding this work of mercy, we shall find that our English sense of honour, our mere natural hatred of hypocrisy, comes to the support of our loyalty and devotion to the lofty teaching of Our Lord and Saviour. More might be said on these and kindred topics; but I content myself with falling back on that aspect of our Association which the text has suggested. This work embodies the noble and generous idea of rolling back the mighty tide of selfishness by the unconquerable strength of love. While fostering and marshalling the activities of love for the restoration of the fallen, this Association develops before Christendom and mankind one of the highest evidences of our corporate and Christian life. The cause of Penitentiaries, I am persuaded, may be left with perfect confidence in your hands. Support it, that you may be fellow-helpers to the Truth of God by showing how that Truth, and It alone, can still the strongest passions that enslave the soul. Support it by sacrifices that cost you something which you will really miss, that you, too, may experience that delicious sense, not of merit, but of moral elasticity and expansion, which ever attends upon a truly self-sacrificing deed — that you, too, may know what it is to have passed from the death of selfishness to the life of love.

* Rom. ii. 22.

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